



Graduation Matters Montana Challenge Fund

Frequently Asked Questions

January 2012

The Montana Office of Public Instruction received a grant from the Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation, to fund up to 15 local Graduation Matters Montana (GMM) initiatives each year, for three years, starting in 2012. Grants of up to \$10,000 are available to Montana public schools for existing GMM initiatives and for new GMM initiatives through a competitive application process. To watch a brief webinar on the application process, go to <http://graduationmatters.mt.gov>. For further assistance, please contact Thea Whalen, OPI at 444-5643 or graduationmatters@mt.gov.

The goals of Graduation Matters Montana are to: (1) increase the number of Montana students graduating from high school ready for college and the 21st century workplace; (2) establish a network between schools, businesses, and community organizations for student success; and (3) create school-based and community-based opportunities to inspire students to stay in school and graduate.

The purpose of the Graduation Matters Montana Challenge Fund is to assist the development of existing and newly-forming Graduation Matters initiatives. Funds will be used to award grants to eligible applicants to meet the goals of GMM.

1. Who may apply for a *GMM Challenge Fund* grant?

Local education agencies (LEAs) in Montana.

2. What are the core elements of a Graduation Matters Initiative?

Local school districts and their community, family and business partners are encouraged to design and implement a Graduation Matters initiative that works for their local community. The Office of Public Instruction provides support and research-based best practices of policies and practices that are proving to be effective in Montana communities. This includes an on-line tool kit that outlines the core elements of Graduation Matters, including: (1) establishing a multi-stakeholder team that includes local business leaders, community leaders, local foundation personnel, educators, youth and families; (2) analyzing school data to develop targeted interventions; (3) making a plan to

implement strategies that are based on current successful efforts and successful efforts elsewhere in Montana; and (4) promoting efforts locally through GMM posters, the media, and I Pledge to Graduate events.

3. What are the requirements to receive a *GMM Challenge Fund* grant?

Successful applicants will be expected to implement the four core elements, as outlined above. Graduation Matters Montana communities will be expected to publicly launch as a Graduation Matters community if they have not already done so, participate in annual GMM Summits, and share what's working and not working with peers in Montana. Applicants are encouraged to leverage GMM funds with other district and community funds, but this is not a requirement.

4. Can a school launch a Graduation Matters initiative if they don't get funding?

Yes. Local school-community partnerships to increase the number of students who graduate from high school can and should be initiated with or without funding from the GMM Challenge Fund. Every school-community GMM partnership – operating with Challenge Fund support or not – is welcome to all technical assistance and Summit gatherings, and is encouraged to learn and share successful strategies.

5. How may LEAs use GMM Challenge Fund grant funds?

LEAs must use grant funds to support activities that build on existing initiatives or that help to jumpstart new GMM initiatives. Allowable expenses include: Stipends for current staff and/or existing school team to convene GMM partners; Stipends for current staff and/or existing school team to coordinate GMM activities; Stipend/contract for external facilitator to convene school/community businesses; Program expenditures to promote GMM initiative; and Program expenditures to promote I Pledge to Graduate event(s).

To build local and regional capacity, grantees may extend an invitation to other schools within the district to participate in GMM professional development.

6. How many grants will be awarded?

The Office of Public Instruction (OPI) will award grants by March 19, 2012. The OPI estimates that 7 to 9 current GMM initiatives and 6 to 8 new GMM initiatives will be awarded.

7. What is the anticipated length of an award?

The OPI will award grants on a competitive basis for a project period of up to 12 months. Applicants will be eligible to reapply for funding in year 2 and year 3 on a competitive basis with new and existing applicants.

8. What is the amount of the award?

The amount of the award is up to \$10,000 per community.

9. Who should be involved in the development of the grant application?

Applicants should involve a variety of stakeholders in the development of the application, including teachers, principals, parents and caregivers, students, the superintendent, school board members, and community members. Evidence of stakeholder involvement and support is required and is part of the application.

10. What is the process for applying and the date the application is due?

The application is available on-line at <http://graduationmatters.mt.gov>. Applications are due no later than February 17, 2012. The OPI strongly recommends that applicants do not wait until the last day to submit applications. No applications will be accepted after 5:00 p.m. MST on the due date.

11. Who will review and score the applications?

Applications will be reviewed and scored by a team of OPI staff and external evaluators.

12. What support will grant applicants receive to prepare their proposals?

The OPI has posted a webinar at <http://graduationmatters.mt.gov>. The OPI also offers on-going support via e-mail and telephone. For further assistance, please contact Thea Whalen, OPI at 444-5643 or graduationmatters@mt.gov.

13. Who do I contact for more information?

The official Web site is: <http://graduationmatters.mt.gov>

If experiencing technical difficulties with the on-line application, please contact 444-3563

For more information, contact: Thea Whalen, OPI at 444-5643 or graduationmatters@mt.gov